

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ATHENS 03538 200934Z

ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, GR
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT ORDER TO END TEACHERS' STRIKE DRAWS
OPPOSITION CRITICISM

REF: ATHENS 2718

1. THE 41-DAY STRIKE OF PRIVATE SCHOOL TEACHERS BECAME A POLITICAL ISSUE ON APRIL 18. MINISTER OF EDUCATION RALLIS ORDERED THE TEACHERS' MOBILIZATION UNDER A LEGISLATIVE DECREE OF SEPTEMBER 2, 1974, WHICH AUTHORIZES THE GOVERNMENT TO REQUISITION THE SERVICES OF PRIVATE EMPLOYEES IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES. HE DIRECTED THEM TO RETURN TO WORK BY APRIL 20. ANY TEACHER WHO REFUSES TO DO SO IS LIABLE TO CRIMINAL CHARGES. RALLIS ALSO ORDERED THE REQUISITION OF ANY SCHOOL WHICH FAILS TO OPEN ON APRIL 20. THE GOVERNMENT COULD THEN ASSIGN PUBLIC TEACHERS AS SUBSTITUTES TO THE REQUISITIONED SCHOOL. SPOKESMEN FOR THE STRIKING TEACHERS CLAIMED THAT RALLIS' ORDER IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL, BUT DID NOT SAY WHETHER OR NOT THEY WOULD RETURN TO WORK ON APRIL 20.

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PAGE 02 ATHENS 03538 200934Z

2. BY LAST WEEK THE TEACHERS' DEMANDS HAD BEEN NARROWED DOWN TO THE PROPOSAL THAT THE GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE PERMANENT TENURE AND THAT DISMISSALS OF TEACHERS BE APPROVED BY A SPECIAL COMMITTEE WHICH WOULD INCLUDE TEACHERS' REPRESENTATIVES. RALLIS HAD RESPONDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT FORCE TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT ON PRIVATE EMPLOYERS,

BUT SAID HE WOULD REQUEST PRIVATE SCHOOL OWNERS TO EXTEND THE DURATION OF THEIR CONTRACTS FROM THE CURRENT THREE-YEAR PERIOD TO SIX YEARS AND THAT HE WOULD SUBSEQUENTLY ATTEMPT TO SEE THAT THE SIXYEAR CONTRACT WAS REQUIRED BY THE NEW LAW ON PRIVATE EDUCATION.

3. ON APRIL 14 RALLIS HAD URGED THE TEACHERS TO RETURN TO WORK AND THE PRIVATE SCHOOL OWNERS TO OPEN THEIR DOORS ON APRIL 18, FILLING VACANT POSITIONS WITH SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS OR ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL IF NECESSARY. THE FEDERATION OF PRIVATE TEACHERS THEN RESPONDED ON APRIL 16 BY VOTING TO EXTEND THE STRIKE TO APRIL 23.

4. NEVERTHELESS, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, MOST OF GREECE'S APPROXIMATELY 160,000 PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS WERE ABLE TO RETURN TO THEIR CLASSES ON APRIL 18. OF ATHENS' 130 PRIVATE SCHOOLS, HOWEVER, 30, WITH A COMBINED ENROLLMENT OF SOME 4,000 STUDENTS, DID NOT OPEN. RALLIS MADE SPECIFIC REFERENCE IN HIS MOBILIZATION ORDER TO THE FAILURE OF SOME OF ATHENS' LARGEST PRIVATE SCHOOLS TO OPEN.

5. OPPOSITION LEADERS IMMEDIATELY ATTACKED RALLIS' ORDER. EDHK LEADER GEORGE MAVROS, WHO ON APRIL 14 HAD URGED THE STRIKING TEACHERS TO RETURN TO WORK, ANNOUNCED THAT THE ORDER WAS UNCONSTITUTIONAL UNDER THE SECTION OF ARTICLE 22 WHICH PROHIBITS COMPULSORY LABOR. HE SAID THAT THE ONLY SOLUTION WAS FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO BRING THE DRAFT LAW ON PRIVATE EDUCATION BEFORE PARLIAMENT

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PAGE 03 ATHENS 03538 200934Z

SO THAT IT COULD BE DISCUSSED AND WAYS FOUND TO MEET THE TEACHERS LEGITIMATE DEMANDS. RALLIS RESPONDED THAT HE HAS NO OBJECTION TO DEBATE ON THE DRAFT LAW, BUT HE DID NOT INDICATE WHEN IT WOULD BE PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT. OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS CRITICIZED RALLIS' ACTION IN STRONGER TERMS. ILIAS ILIOU OF EDA STATED THAT IF RALLIS HIMSELF HAD BEEN LESS STUBBORN HE COULD HAVE FOUND A PROPER SOLUTION. PASOK'S ANDREAS PAPANDREOU REFERRED TO CASES OF COMPULSORY MOBILIZATION OF WORKERS UNDER THE JUNTA AND SAID THAT THE TEACHERS' DEMANDS SHOULD BE MET. BOTH COMMUNIST PARTIES ALSO CRITICIZED RALLIS AND SUPPORTED THE TEACHERS AND THEIR DEMANDS.

6. COMMENT: RALLIS' ACTION TO REOPEN THE PRIVATE SCHOOLS IS UNDOUBTEDLY POPULAR WITH THE THOUSANDS OF PARENTS THROUGHTOUT GREECE WHOSE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN AT HOME SINCE MARCH 7. WHETHER HIS MIBILIZATION ORDER WAS LEGAL OR WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, GIVEN THAT MOST PRIVATE SCHOOLS APPARENTLY REOPENED BEFORE THE ORDER WAS ISSUED,

IS OPEN TO QUESTION. BUT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES SHOULD DERIVE LITTLE POLITICAL BENEFIT FROM CRITICIZING WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE END OF A SITUATION WHICH CAUSED HARDSHIP FOR THE STUDENTS (AS IT WILL DIMINISH THEIR SUMMER HOLIDAY) AND PARENTS INVOLVED.

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